



JOHNSTON

THE JOHN (JOHNSON) JOHNSTON FAMILY

Dr. Ward M. Sharp

John Johnstons parents emigrated from New Jersey and settled at Beverley Manor in the colony of Virginia in about 1740. Beverley Manor was a land grant by Virginia in 1736 to establish a colony west of the Blue ridge in Western Virginia. Its original settlers were, for most part, of Scotch and Scotch-Irish ancestry. Present day Staunton, Virginia is centrally situated in what was formerly the Beverley Manor land grant. Augusta County was formed in 1745 with Staunton its County seat.

John Johnston was among those early pioneers residing in the Staunton area prior to the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754. The Colony - up to this time - had enjoyed some 22 years of peace with the Indians. But by 1754, war clouds were gathering on the horizon signifying pending hostilities.

In early 1754, the Governor of Virginia approved an expedition to attack French and Indians at Fort Pitt. On March 8, 1754, Capt Andrew Lewis and John Johnston enlisted in the Virginia Militia at Staunton. Young Johnston serving as an Aid to Capt. Lewis. They proceeded with other Augusta Militia to Wills Creek (Fort Cumberland). There they joined the main body of troops under command of Col. Joshua Fry and Lieut. Col. George Washington.

These troops proceeded to Great Meadows - Fort Necessity located east of present day Uniontown, Pe. There they were engaged in battle with a large body of French and Indians on July 3, 1754. The Virginia Militia, having suffered defeat, were allowed to return home. Capt Lewis suffered a hip wound in the engagement (See Muster Roll before battle of Meadows July 3, 1754).

More determined now than ever, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia made plans for another expedition to attack Fort Pitt. But this time he engaged two regiments of British soldiers under command of General Braddock. A year and a week following the 1754 defeat, Braddock met disaster on July 9, 1755.

Neither Capt. Andrew Lewis nor John Johnston were attached to Braddocks ill-fated expedition. Instead, they were thought to be engaged in fortifying the frontier against pending Indian attacks. For example, Fort Dinwiddie near Mountain Grove, Virginia was built the summer of 1755. John Johnston worked out of this fort during the Indian War. It was on this assignment as an Indian spy that he became knowledgeable of that part of the Upper Greenbrier River territory of present day Pocahontas County.

Treaty with the Indians following the French and Indian War in 1768 froze or prohibited land acquisition between the top of the Alleghany Mountain Range (followed present Virginia - West Virginia boundary in Pocahontas) on the East and the Ohio River on the West. The territory remained off bounds to white settlement until the treaty with the Indians at Fort Stanwix in 1768. An influx of our earliest pioneers arrived in the Upper Greenbrier following the 1768 Treaty. John Johnston was among these pioneer settlers.

He either acquired land or claimed, surveyed or applied for patents prior to 1776. A quote from an undated copy of the Pocahontas Times stated that John Johnston acquired 1500 acres in the Jerico community near Marlinton. I did not locate this patent, but I did locate one for a parcel of land issued to John Johnston dated in 1776. This patent stated that the land was acquired from within the 100,000 acre Land Grant issued to the Greenbrier Company in 1752. Andrew Lewis was a partner and one of the founders of the Greenbrier Company. This 1776 parcel appeared to not be for land in Jerico but in the Swago community. But the two tracts or surveys may have joined.

The homestead of this pioneer was situated near the former Porter Kellison residence west of Marlinton over Price Hill in the Swago Community. His grave - according to my grandmother Melinda Moore Cochran - was in the vicinity of his homestead.

A group of these earliest pioneers formed a community in present Swago, Buckeye, Millpoint and Little Levels Communities, following 1768. Indian dissatisfaction with the Treaty in 1768 plus British agitation caused hostilities to flare. Having grown up among the Indians during years of peace -- prior to the French and Indian War -- these pioneers detected impending dangers. They decided to build a Fort and remain to defend it.

This Fort, known as Fort Keckley or Cackley, was completed in 1772 (Kercheval). It was a stockade type place of refuge that stood on top of a hill near the present village of Mill Point and was the first of four forts built in the upper Greenbrier of present Pocahontas County (McNeil). Fort Cackley was fashioned and patterned after the types built at start of French and Indian War in 1754-55. This Fort was built and manned by the local settlers. Clover Lick and Warwicks Forts were built by the Virginia Militia. John Johnston -- being an expert woodworker and joint fitter, etc., of heavy timbers played an important role in the construction of Fort Cackley. He served also as an Indian spy or scout.

John Johnston -- like many of the pioneer men -- did not marry until into their 30's or early 40's. Ages of his oldest children suggest he married in the early 1770's. His first wife was believed to have been a Ewing - died when a relatively young mother, leaving him with 6 children. He employed Elizabeth Aldridge as his governess to care for his children (Genealogy: the Aldridge Family). He and Elizabeth were later married. Elizabeths orphaned son William Aldridge became the progenitor of the Aldridges in Bath and Pocahontas Counties.

John Johnstons children - according to Bath County marriage bonds - were James, Michael, Thomas and daughters Catherine, Polly and Elizabeth. A daughter Sallie did not appear among the marriage bonds. Marriage bonds of his children (Bath County Marriage Bonds by Metheny & Wise) reveal that they all adopted the name spelled Johnson while their father adhered to the traditional spelling of Johnston. Therefore, beginning with the children of John Johnston, the surname was spelled Johnson thus compounding the problem in tracing the genealogy of the pioneer. The reason for dropping the "t" in Johnston for Johnson was not known.

Birth dates of John Johnstons children were not determined but marriage dates were based on Bath County marriage bonds. James the oldest son was married three times as follows: to Elizabeth Hughes in 1795, to Elizabeth Poage in 1804, to Sarah Batey in 1812. A son William was born in 1799 to the first marriage James and Elizabeth H. Johnson. This William Johnson was of importance - as will be seen later - as the major progenitor of the family name Johnson in Pocahontas County.

John Johnstons son Michael married Hanna Hughes in 1805 and Thomas married Becca Burr in 1813. Both Michael and Thomas dropped out of sight suggesting they possibly emigrated. Catherine married Aaron Moore son of the pioneer Moses Moore on 1/18/09. Catherine went by the nickname "Katie or Kate". John Johnston was present to consent for the marriage of his daughter "Katie". Elizabeth and Polly Johnson were both married on May 12, 1812 to Jacob Waugh and William Gay respectively. This occasion was of note since both the pioneer and his second wife Elizabeth Aldridge were present to consent for daughters Elizabeth and Polly.

William Johnson, son of James Johnson and grandson of the pioneer John Johnston, married Mary Lamb October 18, 1818. William and Mary Lamb Johnson's children were cited from census records according to year of birth as follows: Jane (1825), Sarah (1827), Susan (1830), William Ewing (1833) and James Elliott Johnson in 1837. These birth dates are approximate - give or take a year. Marriages of the above were based on marriage bonds: Jane married Milton Sharp 9/14/1854; Sarah married John Sharp (of Verdant Valley-Fairview) 6/3/1845; Susan married Marcus Waugh 8/29/1850; William Ewing Johnson married twice - first to Elizabeth Wilson of Upshur County, W. Va; second time to Eliza McCoy 11/13/1879; James Elliott Johnson married Sally Friel 6/24/1857.

John Johnston grew up in an unspoiled, pristine, early American Frontier. He was an expert hunter and woodsman. His father and grandfather plied the woodworkers trade which was a major occupation at the time outside of farming for a livelihood. John had ready use of wood working tools. He became a shaper of bows and arrows under the tutelage of his father and grandparents.

The bow and arrow provided much meat of small game for the table when gunpowder was scarce and expensive. It was handed down through his daughter Catherine that her father was an expert bowman. The family would have gone hungry at many times - when small game was for the taking -- had it not been for the bow and arrow at the hands of the father and his sons.

The compiler of the John Johnston family history -- Ward M. Sharp of Russell, Penna -- is a great, great grandson of the pioneer. His great grandmother was Catherine "Katie" Johnson. Catherine married Aaron Moore in 1809. Their daughter Melinda married William Cochran of Stony Creek. They had two children, William Cochran Jr. who moved to Sunbury, Ohio and daughter Catherine Cochran who married my father Giles Sharp.

John Johnston was born circa 1734 and died circa 1826 at age 92.